

Teens and Prescription Pain Medicine Abuse

It's an alarming fact—nearly 1 in 5 teenagers has abused a prescription pain medicine, according to a survey of teens from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. Today, more and more teens turn to prescription medicines rather than street drugs as a way to get “high.” Part of the reason is that prescription medicines are easier to get than illegal drugs. What's more, many teens believe (wrongly) that prescription medicines are safer than street drugs.

What you and your teen need to know

You should make sure your teen understands that prescription pain medicines help those who need them, but they can be just as dangerous as illegal drugs if used in the wrong way. In fact, overdose of pain medicines can be deadly in extreme cases. Taking pain medicines with alcohol or with certain other drugs can add to the risk.

What you can do to help

- **Store all medicines out of reach.** You should store your medicines in a safe place that's out of sight for your child but easy for you to monitor. Keep especially close tabs if you have some of the medicines teens are more likely to abuse. These types of medicines include pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives, and tranquilizers
- **Keep track of your medicine.** Know the names and amounts of the medicines in your home. You should be suspicious if you notice you have less medicine than expected, or if you need to refill your prescription more frequently than expected
- **Discard medicines you don't need.** Dispose of your medicine by removing it from the container, mixing it with something unappealing (such as used kitty litter or coffee grounds), and placing the mixture in an empty can or trash bag. To protect your water supply, do not flush medicines down the toilet, unless the medicine label or your pharmacist tells you otherwise
- **Monitor online activity.** Some kids use the Internet to buy drugs or share tips about the types and amounts of drugs that can give them a good “high.” As such, it's a good idea to check the browser histories on your child's computer every so often and take note of sites visited that cause you concern
- **Know the risks—and share your knowledge.** Remember, part of the reason many teens abuse prescription drugs is that they falsely believe that medicines from a doctor can't be harmful. Don't assume your teen knows the dangers of abuse and overuse. Learn more about the medicines in your home and talk to your kids about their risks
- **Set clear expectations.** People are more likely to abuse drugs if they believe that it is socially “OK” to do so. Tell your child clearly that it's not “OK” to use medicines that were not prescribed for them and that they should never take any medicine without your knowledge
- **Be observant and involved.** As your teen has become more independent, it's more important than ever to know and be involved with his or her day-to-day life. This can help you provide positive guidance and also observe changes in behavior that could signal problems. If you do see something that concerns you, trust your instincts and discuss it with your child immediately
- **Help your teen manage life's stresses.** It's important to talk to your kids often, not only about drugs but also about some of the common issues that can cause teens to abuse drugs. Boredom and stress are 2 key reasons why teens say they abuse drugs. Address these issues before they become problems by talking every day and providing positive outlets for stress relief